

In The Claims:

Please cancel claims 2 and 8 without prejudice and subject to Applicant's right to pursue these claims in related applications, amend claims 1 and 3-7, and add new claims 11-18, so that the claims hereafter read as follows:

1. (Currently Amended) A composition comprising:  
a thixotropic pharmaceutically acceptable gel; and  
~~containing~~ an antimicrobial agent contained in the  
thixotropic gel;

wherein the thixotropic gel is characterized by:

(i) easy flow under the shear forces imparted by a  
conventional medical syringe such that the composition may be  
instilled into, and withdrawn from, a hemodialysis catheter using  
such a conventional medical syringe;

(ii) sufficient cohesiveness such that, when the  
composition is moved through the lumen of a hemodialysis catheter  
using a conventional medical syringe, the composition advances  
through the lumen as a cohesive rod-shaped mass; and

(iii) when the composition is disposed within the lumen  
of a hemodialysis catheter which is installed in the vascular

system of a patient, the composition remains in the lumen  
substantially without leakage; and

wherein the thixotropic gel is biocompatible and  
biodegradable in blood ~~used for catheter protection.~~

2. (Canceled)

3. (Currently Amended) A composition according to ~~as in~~  
claim 1 wherein the ~~said~~ gel is a hydrogel.

4. (Currently Amended) A composition according to ~~as in~~  
claim 1 wherein the ~~said~~ gel is a microgel.

5. (Currently Amended) A composition according to ~~as in~~  
claim 1 wherein the antimicrobial agent is taurolidine, taurultam  
or a mixture thereof.

6. (Currently Amended) A composition according to ~~as~~  
~~claimed in~~ claim 1 wherein the ~~said~~ gel also contains a ~~an~~  
medically acceptable anticoagulant agent.

7. (Currently Amended) A composition according to as-  
~~elaimed in any of the~~ claim 1 wherein the ~~said~~ composition  
contains salicylic acid or one of its salts.

8. (Canceled)

9. (Withdrawn) A locking agent for an indwelling catheter  
that is composed of a thixotropic gel or a colloidal fluid that  
is retained in the catheter with minimal loss during instillation  
and/or the duration between uses of the catheter and can be  
instilled and withdrawn using a syringe.

10. (Withdrawn) A catheter lock solution according to claim  
9 in which the agent is albumin.

11. (New) A composition according to claim 3 wherein the  
hydrogel is a natural polymer.

12. (New) A composition according to claim 11 wherein the  
natural polymer comprises at least one selected from the group  
consisting of: serum albumin; collagen; and alginates.

13. (New) A composition according to claim 3 wherein the hydrogel is a synthetic polymer.

14. (New) A composition according to claim 13 wherein the synthetic polymer comprises at least one selected from the group consisting of: polyvinyl alcohol; poly(ethylene oxide); poly(hydroxyethylene); and a polyelectrolyte.

15. (New) A composition according to claim 14 wherein the polyelectrolyte comprises at least one from the group consisting of: poly(acrylic acid); poly(styrene sulfonate); and carboxymethylcellulose (CMC).

16. (New) A system comprising:  
a hemodialysis catheter; and  
a catheter lock comprising a thixotropic gel containing an antimicrobial agent therein.

17. (New) A method for providing microbe-free access to the vascular system of a patient, the method comprising the steps of:  
providing a hemodialysis catheter;

deploying the hemodialysis catheter into the vascular system of a patient; and

sealing the hemodialysis catheter with a catheter lock, wherein the catheter lock comprises a thixotropic gel containing an antimicrobial agent therein.

18. (New) A method for preventing microbial colonization of a lumen of a catheter placed within a patient, the method comprising the steps of:

providing a catheter lock, wherein the catheter lock comprises a thixotropic gel containing an antimicrobial agent therein; and

sealing the catheter with the catheter lock.

19. (New) A composition according to claim 1 wherein the gel is a colloidal suspension.

20. (New) A system according to claim 16 wherein the catheter is a hemodialysis catheter.